

NO WEAKLINGS AMONG BELGIUM'S PAST RULERS



baron Surlet de Chokier, Regent of Belgium.

Kings of Remarkable Country Have Been Few in Number but Large in Ability, Says Author

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defy their French suzerain. From the time of Louis VI. to the end of the fourteenth century a continuous struggle took place between the Flemings and the Capetian Kings of France, in which the Flemings would have succumbed but for the aid of England.

Flanders lost territory in the long war that followed that astounding victory, but she regained her dynasty and her independence. The support of England protected her against fresh aggression on the part of France. At this period, already ancient, of friendship and commerce bound Flanders to England. Great numbers of Flemings had enrolled themselves in the army of William the Conqueror. These, the conquest achieved, remained in England.

The ties which bound Belgium to France grew weaker and more weak as disasters swept over France during the Hundred Years War. At the same time the lesser principalities in Belgium became merged in the greater ones and the line of demarcation traced at Verdun was gradually blotted out. In the fourteenth century the older dynasties died out in the direct lines and their States passed by inheritance to three foreign houses. The house of Luxembourg became ruler of Brabant, while retaining Luxembourg; Bavaria ruler of Holland, Zealand, Hainaut and Liege; and Burgundy of Flanders and Artois. Of these Luxembourg first disappeared before the efforts of its rivals, and the political genius of Philippe le Bon triumphed over the second. In the middle of the fifteenth century all the lay principalities of the Low Countries except Guelders and the Grand Duke of the Occident as their hereditary Prince, and the ecclesiastical States of Cambrai, Liège and Utrecht, the Bishops of which were members of the Holy See, were placed under that Prince's protection.

By these changes the work of centuries was completed. A new state appeared on the map between France and Germany, not only precursor, but direct and legitimate ancestor of the modern kingdom of Belgium and Holland. The political organization created by the Burgundian dukes in Belgium remained the basis of that country's national institutions until the end of the old regime. Amidst the changes of kingdoms and dynasties Belgium was neither absorbed nor annexed, until the French revolution and then her annexation to France was but momentary. By the treaty of 1815, of Mary of Burgundy with Maximilian of Austria the scepter of Belgium passed into the hands of the Hapsburgs. It was as heirs of Burgundy that the Kings and Emperors of Spain and Austria ruled over the Low Countries.

When the Belgians announced their intention to elect a King the French declared with mighty clamor, in which Legitimists, Orleanists and Bonapartists joined, none but a Frenchman was possible as King of Belgium.

At this period Belgium was crowded with political exiles from France, men eager for war, thereby articulate. These exiles were split into two camps, one of which was composed of the Liberals, who had fled from their country to escape from the police of Charles X. These were but voluntary exiles since the July revolution they remained in Belgium to advance there the cause of the French Government that revolution had set up. The other camp was composed of Bonapartists, many of them old soldiers of Napoleon. Each party put forward different candidates for the throne.

At this period, in November, 1830, when the Belgians voted the exclusion of the House of Orange, another candidate for the Belgian throne and the hand of an Orleans princess appeared on the scene. This was Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, who, having lost the Consort's crown of England by the ill fate which caused the death of his wife, Princess Charlotte, had just, to the annoyance of the great Powers, rejected the throne of Greece, after intruding for it and accepting it.

When Prince Leopold became a candidate for the Greek throne Charles X. still reigned in France, and the Prince was to have sought to strengthen his candidature by a marriage with the Princess of Berry, the mother of the Dauphin heir. When Charles X. fell and Louis Philippe came to the throne

Prince Leopold transferred his proposals to the new reigning family and sought an alliance with an Orleans princess, but Louis Philippe would not listen to his proposals. The King of the French was still less inclined to listen to them when they were renewed in connection with the candidature of Prince Leopold to the Belgian throne.

When the allied sovereigns came to London in 1815 the most brilliant offer in their suite was the young Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. Cadet of the German ducal family of Coburg, he had passed bravely, even gloriously, through many vicissitudes. Napoleon had seized his father's states and revenues. When he was a child his family was obliged to rely, for a time, on the kindness of their servants for necessities. Throughout his boyhood the family remained sunk in debt, forced to live in the most meagre manner, almost weekly borrowing fresh sums from one of their men of business, who was always offered jewels, plate or other valuable objects in security. Like every other princeling in Europe, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg found himself, not willingly, in Napoleon's court. Napoleon declared he was the most handsome man he had ever seen, and wanted to attach him to his staff, but Prince Leopold had no desire to enter the Emperor's service, a duty of aid of Josephine, it is said, managed to avoid it.

He was young, beautiful, brave, accomplished, high born and poor. No sooner did the self-willed heirless to the throne of England see him than she resolved to marry him. The engagement of Princess Charlotte to the hereditary Prince of Orange had just been announced. Without hesitation she flung over that drunken bride.

The Princess never forgot she was her to the English throne, and the Prince was content she should not forget it. Before her marriage her life was as unrestrained as her wild mother's had been. She was a tomboy, apt, satirical and fond of mischief, but kindhearted. She gained in business and self-control after her marriage. Her short married life was one of broken happiness. Its end was the more sad because due exercise of medical skill could have averted it.

When he came to England King Leopold brought with him a doctor, Christian Stockmar, who was throughout his life his guide in all political affairs and the keeper of his conscience. Stockmar was promoted from the position of doctor to that of private secretary and ennobled. Unhappily he was as cautious as the Prince, whom the Prince himself nicknamed the "Marquis Pieu-a-Pieu." When Princess Charlotte was about to bear a child Stockmar saw that she was in labor, and the treatment given to her by the English doctors was wrong. Instead of building up her strength they put the Princess on low diet and bled her constantly. Stockmar did not hint a word of his opinion. He saw it would be safer for him, a foreigner, to have nothing whatever to say to so important a case. When the accoucheur arrived the Princess spent over sixty hours in labor. The English doctors of that period would not resort to artificial means to aid her. The result was that she was delivered of a still-born child and died herself five hours later, in the early hours of the 6th of November, 1817.

Hope of sharing the English throne with his wife's death; but the position of Prince Leopold in England gained a brilliant one. He had inherited the magnificent estate of Carébourg, an annuity of fifty thousand pounds a year. He carried a Field Marshal's baton. He had arranged a marriage between his sister and the Duke of Kent, and the issue of that marriage was that she was delivered of a still-born child and died herself five hours later, in the early hours of the 6th of November, 1817.

The Belgians received their new King

enthusiastically. He was enthroned in Brussels in the open air, with somewhat of theatrical display and scene shifters' mystery. The steps of the Church of St. Jacques, on the top of Coudeberg, "the cold hill," were transformed into a great platform, on which stood the members of the Congress and the other notabilities of the revolution, grouped around the regent, Surlet de Chokier, who sat in a gilded chair.

Leopold had landed in France and travelled with as much speed as possible to the Belgian capital. At Coudeberg he dismounted and took his place on a chair placed near that of the regent. Thereupon Surlet de Chokier made a long speech, telling of what he had done as regent, and resigned his regency. The speech finished, the gilt chairs vanished, a throne appeared, Leopold pronounced the few words which form the simple but sufficient oath of the Belgian Kings and mounted the throne.

Whatever Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg may have been during the years of his widowhood in England Leopold I. of Belgium, from the first moment he landed on Belgian ground, proved himself an enlightened and energetic sovereign. In the contest with the Dutch he bravely exposed himself to danger. Nothing but a chance incident prevented him from being taken prisoner by them. It was not his fault that he had to call the assistance of France to his aid. The French army came and went. Nothing was exacted by France for her aid. The marriage between King Leopold and a daughter of Louis Philippe was already arranged. But while France exacted nothing, Holland, although again conquered, managed to gain much. The treaty which had taken such a long time in the making was broken; years passed before a new treaty was made to which Holland consented. Under the new treaty, on a diplomatic pretext,

the greatest curse that ever fell on a nation is that of its people's emigration—it is always the most virile who leave, the weakest who remain at home. No such curse has fallen or is likely to fall on Belgium. The Belgians have the good fortune to know when they have enough. A Belgian goes to a distant or foreign land to make his fortune, not to settle in it; and, his fortune made, he

returns home to enjoy well earned leisure.

In founding the Congo State King Leopold did the Belgians an untimely good. His benefits to Belgium were many. There is hardly a commune in the country which was not improved and embellished by him. Brussels was little more than a provincial town when he came to the throne. He made it a city of palaces. He was a palace builder and empire maker to the last. When he died his body was borne from the Palace of Brussels through scaffolding which covered the new work he was carrying out at that palace and through scaffolding of the Church of Laeken, which he was completing, to its last resting place in the royal vault under the church. Views other than his prevailed in Belgium for a moment after his death. Many of King Leopold's plans died with him. Such is the inevitable fate of a man of great ideas, but his work for Belgian expansion could not die.

The great things King Leopold did in Belgium faded into insignificance before what he did in the Congo. That work was generously conceived. Its results were magnificent. If from being purely a humanitarian enterprise it became something other the King should not be blamed. His actions with regard to the Congo for many years were admitted on all sides to be entirely noble. To develop the country he poured his private means into it. For years he met the States' deficit by a grant of \$40,000 annually to its budget. A moment came when he was financially ruined. He was actually without sufficient cash to meet his ordinary expenses. At that moment the Belgian Chambers came to his rescue and gave him not only a large loan but a free hand. Almost at the same moment the Congo State became profitable. The use of rubber in Europe and America increased immensely. King Leopold who looked on all men, white or black, as pawns, forced the natives of the Congo to rather the rubber for him, showing them but little mercy when they did not labor as he required; but he must be remembered if he took much from them he gave them more. Civilization never marched forward so much quicker stride than it has done in the Congo. Belgian soldiers and Belgian priests worked and are working side by side to advance it. The pay given to Congo officials has never been great, but volunteers were never wanting from the Belgian army, always loyal to its

King. He was determined to continue his father's work and make the country great and prosperous. Leopold I. preserving the appearance of a constitutional ruler, had on great occasions forced all to bend before him. Leopold II. was born to be an autocrat, and became one.

Belgian rulers before him had made their joyous entries into their capitals with much splendor and martial display as captives to the burghers than as their lords. The citizens presented their keys on bended knees, but at the same time they presented their ancient charters to be ratified, set out grievances to be redressed, put forth demands for new privileges to be granted before the mighty sovereign was permitted to enter the city. When King Leopold II. entered his city of Brussels it was he, not the citizens, who demanded measures for the city's good.

All that he promised Belgium for the advancement of the country in this grandiose speech King Leopold II. performed. He came to the throne King of a little people—a people with great memories. It is true, but with a narrow outlook. When he died Belgium had been made by him a great country. Her borders cannot be enlarged in Europe, but in the colony he gave the kingdom Belgium has an immense area teeming with riches. In that colony is a future under their own country's flag for the ambitious youths of Belgium—and there they are now seeking it.

King Leopold II.

in the most hideous Victorian style. There he worked with the assistance of a private secretary and an aide de camp. His secretary's office was in Brussels. Ordinarily on bicycles rode to it fast on each other's heels, all day long from Laeken with the King's orders, written by himself on tiny scraps of paper. His business interests were worldwide. He formed dozens of companies not only in the Congo but also in China, Russia, Germany and elsewhere. These companies were composed, nominally, of officials of his household, his secretary, his doctor, his lawyers, his bankers—all, in connection with these companies, were, as to him, men of straw.

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in the greatest awe of his imperious uncle.

King Leopold's affection for his successor might perhaps be better described as detestation. Outwardly most courteous to the Prince he was in private abnormally strict with him. It is no wonder Prince Albert looked and acted as a boy for he was treated as one. He dared not go anywhere or attend any function without King Leopold's permission, and King Leopold's permission was more often refused than granted.

Until he reached his seventeenth year, in 1891, Prince Albert had no expectation of succeeding to the throne. It was a tragedy which the House of Flanders of his father's son. Up to then Prince Albert had led the ordinary life of Continental princelings. He was educated in part at the military school, in part by private tutors, but without any training in the difficult art of kingship. He is, or seems to be, the most conservative of men. The moment he found himself heir to the throne he set to work to improve what he considered his imperfect education. Daily he sat at the feet of Baron Lambert, Belgium's great diplomatist, and learned the secrets of diplomacy from him. A liberal professor, head of the School of Institute established by the millionaire Solvay, gave him lessons in political economy. When he found people hinted he was allowing himself to be overinfluenced by the Liberals he added to his tutors two clergymen, one a Dominican, the other a Jesuit, and who wrote the severest criticisms of King Leopold's Congo work. The Church's instructors did not make as much parade as the Liberals of their work with the Prince, and it was generally believed that he was wholly Liberal. This was far from being the fact.

Belgian politicians who thought King Albert a weakling because he held his place holding his time in patience while his uncle reigned were speedily undeceived when he came to the throne. King Albert's first act was to make a clean sweep of those who had been in King Leopold's service. From the highest court official to the lowest groom all were dismissed with fitting recompense. Those who had been in King Albert's entourage while he was heir apparent were promoted to fill the other places in the royal household. They were men well chosen, drawn from each class and party, capable of keeping the King informed of the state of public opinion and of the real needs and desires of the people.

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Until he reached his seventeenth year, in 1891, Prince Albert had no expectation of succeeding to the throne. It was a tragedy which the House of Flanders of his father's son. Up to then Prince Albert had led the ordinary life of Continental princelings. He was educated in part at the military school, in part by private tutors, but without any training in the difficult art of kingship. He is, or seems to be, the most conservative of men. The moment he found himself heir to the throne he set to work to improve what he considered his imperfect education. Daily he sat at the feet of Baron Lambert, Belgium's great diplomatist, and learned the secrets of diplomacy from him. A liberal professor, head of the School of Institute established by the millionaire Solvay, gave him lessons in political economy. When he found people hinted he was allowing himself to be overinfluenced by the Liberals he added to his tutors two clergymen, one a Dominican, the other a Jesuit, and who wrote the severest criticisms of King Leopold's Congo work. The Church's instructors did not make as much parade as the Liberals of their work with the Prince, and it was generally believed that he was wholly Liberal. This was far from being the fact.

Belgian politicians who thought King Albert a weakling because he held his place holding his time in patience while his uncle reigned were speedily undeceived when he came to the throne. King Albert's first act was to make a clean sweep of those who had been in King Leopold's service. From the highest court official to the lowest groom all were dismissed with fitting recompense. Those who had been in King Albert's entourage while he was heir apparent were promoted to fill the other places in the royal household. They were men well chosen, drawn from each class and party, capable of keeping the King informed of the state of public opinion and of the real needs and desires of the people.

The Belgians are not invariably moral, but they are not hypocrites. They preferred their ruler to make no false parade of virtues he did not possess. Scandal based itself with King Leopold's name, but neither King nor people heeded it, and the reproving voice of the Church was silenced as his end drew near by a marriage between the King and she who was his companion at the last. This marriage was not morigatious, for inordinate marriages are unknown in Belgium, but it was extraneous, as it received the benediction of the Church without the civic rite necessary to legalize marriages in Belgium. When the King died she who was his wife in the eyes of the Church, magnificently dowered, passed out of Belgium and Belgian history.

Albert, the present King of the Belgians, came to the throne, as far as the Belgian people knew, little better than an untitled stranger. At the time of his accession he was 35 years of age and the father of three children, yet something of a boyish look about his long, slim figure, joined to his trick of blushing frequently, made this princely General of the Belgian army seem a boy in his teens. As heir to the throne he had taken his seat in the Senate on the death of his father, and in the Senate he had delivered speeches, but these speeches were far different from those his uncle and predecessor delivered when he sat in the Senate as heir to the throne. King Leopold II., when Duke of Brabant, had already the wide views and the determination of the empire maker. Prince Albert's speeches, read with baneful hesitancy akin to mumbling, dealt with somewhat waterlogged economic projects. The truth was that the future King, though not devoid of courage and resolution, stood

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